

The University of Chicago

JEWISH AND GRAECO-  
ROMAN INFLUENCES UPON PAUL'S  
ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVINITY SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF NEW TESTAMENT AND  
EARLY CHRISTIAN LITERATURE

1933

By  
HAZEL ELORA FOSTER

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## CHAPTER VIII

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis has been to present Paul in his own social setting both Jewish and pagan with a view to finding out in how far he was a man of his times in regard to his attitudes toward women. Sometimes the situation was practically the same in Judaic and Graeco-Roman circles. At times there was a difference in attitude. In such cases we have tried to see whether Paul conformed to either environment, and if so, to which. We have assumed that as a world traveller and as an active resident and missionary with first-hand contacts in a number of the world's most prominent and typical cities in different regions, working with both Jews and Gentiles of various social classes, he was exposed to the ideas and sentiments that were common to Mediterranean society in general and also to those peculiar to Jewish or to pagan city life.

As a Hellenistic Jew, Paul was knit up with Hebrews all over the Empire. Many of them he knew in the great commercial centers of his activities, and as Jews were prominent in trade and in other ways were led to be frequent travellers, he doubtless knew men of his race from Africa and Spain. The Septuagint was the form of scripture he most used; he was probably familiar with various apocalyptic writings and in the atmosphere in which others were produced, and made use of them as well as of books now termed apocrypha found in the Septuagint. He and multitudes of his fellow Jews still kept in communication with Jerusalem whose rabbis they revered and whose sayings they would follow

with interest and often accept. Thus he was at home in the Jewish world. As he had been born and brought up as a Jew it is natural to look to Judaism first for environmental influences, especially when family life and social custom are concerned.

Paul however had grown up in Cilician Tarsus where pagan philosophy and religion and trade were all strong. He was in more or less touch with Gentiles there, and could scarcely escape coming to some extent under their influence even where through antagonism only. His interest in athletic contests and the military life of the Romans suggests certain pagan admirations that grew up with him. In his missionary work he made friends of various representative ex-pagans, and was forced to face other religions, state, and particularly mystery cult, at least popular expressions of philosophies, stoic and a sort of cynic, as well as various syncretisms, eclectic systems, popular superstitions and kaleidoscopic customs.

Political and social life as high as court circles was before his eyes as it was before the eyes of the world. This acquaintance included knowledge of court and upper class scandals so notorious in this period of sudden governmental and private life shifts. The Greek and Latin books produced in his era were probably on the whole unknown to him but the sentiment and life they expressed belonged in good part to the common experience or were at least familiar to alert city folks, decidedly so to alert metropolitans. Thus we find that Paul was vitally in touch with the paganism of his day in its main city-channels.

Against the Mediterranean world of the first century, then, as a background, we have looked at what Paul said and did in matters that concern women as they come to light in his correspondence, with some use also of material provided by the book



of Acts. We find that Paul was Jewish in the way in which he felt he had to treat and explain everything from a religious viewpoint, so that we could not detach even veils from theology. Yet on the whole we were able to group our topics under two general headings. The first of these concerns the attitude of Paul toward the social and particularly the family status of Christian women, the second his attitudes toward the religious participation and status of women in Christianity and in church activities. As the bases of his views sometimes shift considerably and since, as we have just said, he treats the social problems as religious, it appeared necessary to present the matter of both groups in order to get a clear understanding of either one and in order not to give one-sided and incorrect conclusions about him.

Under Part I we considered the general situation first with a chapter on Judaism as being Paul's native environment, and then of the Graeco-Roman world under approximately the following sequence: asceticism with specific attention to the matter of celibacy, attitudes and conditions regarding sex morality, marriage and marriage problems, remarriage and divorce. This was followed by a chapter in which we took up what Paul said or did in relation to these subjects and tried to locate our findings in his environment if we could. The residuum as we seemed to find it we have left for consideration by others either through psychological studies or through new light that may be received through environmental factors that have not yet come into view.

It has frequently been claimed that Paul was original and arbitrary in what he enjoined about women and in his classification of them. Some credit this to divine inspiration or at least to a wise philosophy of life, as various books read in

preparation for this writing revealed, some of these writers ranking high in scholarship or ecclesiastical life.<sup>1</sup> Many churches cling rigidly to the customs Paul authorized, and disapprove of any seeming deviation from them, holding that any change is a defiance of the will of God. On the other hand, there are people who believe Paul was a fanatic or a tyrant who tried to impose unwelcome new customs on the world.<sup>2</sup> But if Paul's attitudes are compared with those of his day and we find that most of them fit into the scheme of things he knew and that there were real and important reasons for his stand in his own period or that prejudices were so strong in certain directions that he was carried along in the common stream, to that degree the authority and erraticism sink in or even out of, significance. We repeat that it was to try to find out in how far this was true that this thesis was undertaken. Whenever we have seemed to find him original we have not per se proved anything to our purpose but we hope we have somewhat defined and simplified the scope of the problem of his possible individual contributions.

It had been the hope of the writer when doing research to this end to be able to classify Paul at the close of the investigation as either a Jew or a Gentile. This appears now to be impossible. Paul shows himself at times one, at times the other,

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<sup>1</sup>Marcus Dods, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, The Expositor's Bible (London, 1891), pp. 248-57; Archibald Alexander, The Ethics of St. Paul (Glasgow, 1910), pp. 291, 293; Percy Gardner, The Religious Experience of St. Paul (New York, London, 1911), pp. 151-3; E. F. Scott, The Epistle of Paul to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians (London, 1930), pp. 238-9; P. Georg Fangauer, Stilles Frauenheldentum oder Frauenapostolat in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten des Christentums (Münster, 1922), pp. 64-5.

<sup>2</sup>Hendrik Willem Van Loon, R.V.R. (New York, 1930), pp. 172-3; Frances Wickes, The Inner World of Childhood (New York, 1930), p. 287.



in still other cases an eclectic and once in a while a carrier on of previously formed Christian tradition. In a few instances we found him possibly offering a personal opinion independently of known environment. He was often here all things to all men. Nevertheless, by and large, he appears much more often Jewish than Graeco-Roman. On the other hand we have found many instances and areas in which Jews and pagans were agreed. Even in figures of speech there is much in common. An example recently discovered by the present writer is a counterpart to Paul's "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." It is a phrase in the Golden Ass, "that he should be tied and yoked to a good woman."<sup>1</sup>

We have pointed out many instances of similarity in details, for example, the way in which marriage is used in both religions to symbolize union with the divine, the idea that approach to God requires separateness at the time from the other partner, permanent continence as pleasing to God, the veil as significant in marriage and worship, hair dress for women as being conventionally long, for men short, with many more customs and beliefs held in common. The great fundamental bases of life were often even more similar than these more particular phases. In fact, the differences are fewer by far in number than the likenesses even where both are different from our own ways and standards. This is so much the case that the present study makes it pretty evident that the ideal of womanhood in general was much as Dr. Deissmann predicted that study of papyri and inscriptions would show. "A comparison with the Jewish inscriptions and the New Testament would reveal a far-reaching agreement throughout the

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<sup>1</sup>II Cor. 6:14. A.V.; Lucius Apuleius IX.8.

whole of antiquity."<sup>1</sup>

The attitude toward children, which inevitably affected the attitude toward mothers was more sharply differentiated. This is especially true in regard to questions of abortion and exposure, which might be for a pagan a duty toward the State,<sup>2</sup> while for a Jew it was a crime before God.

Paul did not necessarily relate all his ideas about feminine status to one central principle. Galatians 3:28 was proclaimed as the great declaration of freedom for women, and scholars have tried to square everything else he said or did with that. In various situations or localities one can do so. In his actual dealings and associations with particular women in his churches he seems to have carried out this principle completely. Apparently when he became acquainted with a Phoebe or a Priscilla or a Euodia and Synteché he was only too glad to let her exercise any function she pleased and to let her receive any recognition the church could give her.

With the exception of the Corinthian correspondence Paul has nothing to say about the inferiority of women and the necessity that they take care not to be overprominent in the church. Unfortunately for a balanced judgment of the apostle's thinking about the other sex the sheer bulk of the Corinthian attention to these questions in comparison with the total consideration elsewhere in his letters, overwhelms the rest in the minds of most people. We must not forget the heat and indignation and excitement in which Paul wrote even I Corinthians. And when we consider

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<sup>1</sup>Adolph Deissman, Light from the Ancient East (New York, 1927), p. 315, note 1.

<sup>2</sup>C. Schmidt, The Social Results of Early Christianity (London, 1907), pp. 51, 52.

what a difficult and mixed group the women in that church probably were, we are not surprised that their leader tried to make them less conspicuous and less troublesome.

Again, as has been reiterated and insisted upon by writers in fields of Judaism, that it was better in practice than in theory, so it seems to have worked out in the pagan world of Pauline days, also. In theory the woman was still to be under a man's potestas and submissive to his will, even when women were freest in Roman life. If the same had not been true in English and American life under the "common law," women would have had a very sad time indeed. The same thing apparently worked by a sort of natural law with Paul. In theory woman in general ought perhaps to take an inferior place in church activities but in the case of each woman in particular, if she came to attention out of the general group, he granted her the place to which she naturally gravitated. This was the practical thing to do. A good leader could ill be spared by him or his churches. And Paul was practical even where logically inconsistent as we found Jews happy to claim Jews are - healthfully so.

How is it possible to make Galatians 3:28 consistent with Paul's chart of degrees in I Corinthians eleven, where his ascent starts with woman and ends with God, putting woman behind the man in the same way in which he puts the man behind Christ and Christ behind God? For Paul was still a monotheist, anticipating the time when the Son should be subject forever to the Father. The woman would appear to be a different being here, and able to come to Christ only through man. If the passage in I Corinthians 14:34-36 is genuine, he lays himself open to still more serious accusation of inconsistency, for he quotes the law as his authority while at the same time he has abrogated the law. Even if



these verses are not his own, he virtually makes the same sort of mistake, and more seriously so where he claims an eternal principle in this eleventh chapter, and ties down the woman to the original order of creation from which he freed the man. Indeed, he had freed the woman too in the epistle to the Galatians.

The apostle himself however, seemed to half realize that he was going beyond his own beliefs and was almost retracting when he wrote, "In union with the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman." This makes an apparently conscious contradiction within a single paragraph, and may go to show that even in extreme circumstances he could not quite forget his high Galatian stand.

We realize, then, that Paul had discovered in Galatians 3:28 a spiritual equality of men and women as Christians and that practical equality was his ordinary working basis in his churches as far as we know them. At the same time he felt forced for social and ethical reasons to keep the new feminine liberty from degenerating into license, while as a preacher to whom everything was religiously based, he felt bound to rationalize his exceptional positions. He was also in certain strong currents determined by long centuries of crystallized custom or of otherwise strongly established social usage and for such established custom he always showed great respect. Again, he was sometimes borne along by the current of Jewish thought and manner, sometimes by the Gentile stresses. We must add to all this that his mind did not always work logically, as we review briefly some conclusions on various phases of the problem we have been studying.

Paul, then, retained to a great extent a Jewish and generally Oriental assumption of the innate inferiority of the female sex. He even gave this status definite religious and

historical sanction by his acceptance of Eve as the one deceived by the serpent, and as the creature made for Adam and in his image. This was part of his Jewish apocalypticism. He was merely a world citizen when he took for granted the submission and obedience of the wife to the husband, but a Jewish haggadist again when he used Genesis 6:1-4 to enforce his preference for veils. Nevertheless that preference was so almost universal throughout the Roman Empire and beyond it whether Jewish or pagan, that he would have been daring to have taken any other stand than that he did. In fact he appears to have handled the feminine problem in Corinth in a splendidly sane and sensible manner except for his theories about it. Galatians 3:28 was a glorious ideal but concrete situations were handled by practical measures.

His inconsistent placing of woman in dependence on man for her glory and salvation is Jewish sentiment as of course are any references to the creation stories for sanctions. His appeal to custom comes indirectly from stoicism although it is a very faulty example. However, Jews too admired the orderliness of the natural world and with more balance than did the Cynics, while Hellenist Jews like Philo took over the Stoic philosophy here and adopted it with zeal as their own child.

As to the connection of hair dress with religion we have seen in preceding chapters that this had been an age-long concern in many parts of the world, including Greek and Roman, while it was a matter for most punctilious and meticulous and elaborate care on the part of a proper Jewish matron. Here as elsewhere what Paul really determined to do was to conserve or re-establish the status quo. What he wanted was exactly what the average good Jew or good pagan or both, as the case may be, insisted on, too. It was his feeling that he had to enunciate a fundamental religious

principle every time he decided a practical question that sometimes resulted in uncertainty or confusion. As to the matter of silence by women, if the passage enjoining it is Pauline, he had abundant precedent both Jewish and pagan.

As to leadership in the church, it is practically established that the office or rather function, of a deacon was considered as appropriate to a female as to a male member in Pauline churches, that women were often recognized as leaders in the spiritual as well as the temporal church ministries, that they prayed and prophesied in the assembly, and taught, that they may even have been apostles, and may in some cases have administered baptism. In others they assisted in baptisms, and probably helped informally to serve the Lord's Supper. They shared in the sacred kiss, were sometimes house church heads, were financial supporters and might be entrusted with interchurch commissions.

Women must have been important in the pioneer Christian community in these ways and also as personal evangelists, winning other women particularly, as they gained entrance to their homes or met them in the market or at the well where men workers would have small chance for conversation. Through these female converts who seem to have been reached more quickly than men, because they were of an oppressed class seeking outlet and relief, and because the emotional and religious appeal was more effective with them, whole households were doubtless won. Women slaves who became Christians surely often had genuine influence in the homes to which they belonged.

It appears self-evident that women from the first performed many Christian acts of charity and personal helpfulness in the fashion attributed to Dorcas who made clothing for poor



widows.<sup>1</sup> The ministries of Dorcas and Lydia and other devoted women of the New Testament and other Early Christian writings suggest services on the part of their sex that would seem to have obtained in Paul's churches as well as others, and with no sign of his disapprobation.<sup>2</sup> The very fact that there were so many feminine members in his following indicates tolerant and challenging treatment of them.

This large place Paul actually accorded women was certainly not Jewish. We found women in certain cities in Greece almost crushingly restricted, although it is important to note that they were freer religiously than socially, joining in religious processions and other celebrations. Jewesses on the contrary were freer socially than they were religiously. Roman women had been so recently emancipated that we find them in widely differing stages of religious participation. In the Mystery Cults we see a much closer analogy with Paul's churches, an analogy so remarkable in parallels between the two where female activity is concerned that we must look for a genuine influence on the part of the Cults over church procedure and symbolism, here. Women entered most of the great cults in large numbers and performed many important functions there. Their cult positions were often official.

There may be even a closer connection between the church and the guilds, since the latter were not merely ready to assign certain functions to members of the one sex and certain to the other as often in the Mysteries, but they met as far as we can

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<sup>1</sup>Acts 9:36, 39.

<sup>2</sup>T. B. Allworthy, Women in the Apostolic Church (Cambridge, 1917), pp. 141, 143.

judge without consciousness of differences, on a truly democratic level of mutual ministry and worship. This basis of service was characteristic of the Great Church, at least of the first century, where recognition followed response to need and offices were rather services than honors or formal choice. Love and approval were then the cherished recognition. Thus it may be that Paul's churches and others in similar milieu were helped directly by the example of guilds whose social surroundings and obligations and interests were much like their own and far older in their establishment.

There is no doubt that Paul gave wives a higher status than the Jews did, at least as far as their laws were concerned. This is illustrated by his firm insistence that each owed the other equal obligation to perform the peculiar conjugal duty, that the man had no more right to divorce his wife than she had to divorce him, that the spiritual state of the children depended as much on the mother as on the father. His idea of divorce was revolutionary for a Jew. It was not a pagan view. The pagans had only come as far as to say - not all but many of them - that both men and women could divorce their partners. Paul said neither might divorce the other. This attitude may come from his Christian environment consciously or unconsciously, as it seems to fit in nowhere else. In none of these things was he Jewish, but when he gave the father and not the mother recognition as the one responsible for the child he was more in agreement with the Jewish law than with Gentile practice where we found parents uniting to educate their children. However, this admonition being part of a Haustafel<sup>1</sup> we ought not to stress the item much,

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<sup>1</sup>Col. 3:21.

except to remark again that he had a choice of these Haustafeln.

But although Paul advanced considerably beyond the Jewish recognition of women both socially and religiously, yet, since Jewish women were not much involved in his mission and have no Christian history, no actual results in favor of Jewish women followed.

On the other hand, Paul actually checked the progress women had made as wives in most Roman and some Greek and provincial circles by insistence on female inferiority and religiously sanctioned duty of obedience to the husband, also by giving marriage a status beneath celibacy, advertising his own example in this matter, and assuming that at least those expecting the Parousia would marry for passion only and from lack of self-control. This was a far cry indeed from Jewish principle and practice. Eschatology gave Paul a chance to rationalize his preference for a single life. Celibacy was in the air and gathering force all over the Mediterranean except among Jews. Eschatology, on the other hand, was outstandingly Jewish. Paul had an eclectic combination here, whether his own or possibly borrowed from earlier Christians.

As to remarriage it stands to reason that a man who preferred Christians should not marry in the first place would prefer they should do so in the second! This was inevitable with his celibate bias. At least in his advice that widows should not remarry, he was in agreement with the sentiment of later Judaism and of paganism as well.

He insisted on a single standard of morality. His Jewish training started him well on the way to this but he made obligations to chastity the same for each sex. Jews and Gentiles had agreed that adultery was a great offence although it was



flagrantly common and open among pagans in his time. But the Jews held fornication and boy loves and related forms of immorality in horror also. Paul, apparently in harmony with other first generation evangelists, insisted on treating fornication as a major crime, one that separates the soul from union with Christ, - and taught abhorrence of every sort of sexual indulgence. Paul handled sex problems from a social and practical point of view but he explained his solutions on the basis of theology. The body was sacred to God rather than to the soul or to the other partner. Immorality was an insult to God rather than a menace to self or to others. He was akin to Ezekiel, here, and to Ezra and the entire Levitical school, a Jew of the priestly type.

Paul and the early church succeeded only too well, for they were probably in good part responsible for the fact that chastity soon became an obsession among Christians that hastened the tendency to monasticism. None the less, women ever since his day have owed a debt to him for raising the moral standard of the family even though that standard has been often tragically abused or disregarded.

In two respects we fail to find a full place for Paul in his environment. One is his celibacy which is indeed in keeping with the growing Mediterranean tendency but is ill at ease with his Jewish ideas and not satisfactorily explained to himself. Here psychology may be of aid in understanding him. The other point is his use of en Kyrio in giving sanction to woman's position as a Christian. Perhaps theology can still arrive at a satisfying explanation there.

The women of his churches were given a strict standard of family life in which Christian husbands must take their equal

share. Women were virtually safe in the presence of Christian men. They were practically accorded equal rights with men in the family in certain particulars that concerned them most. Husbands were enjoined to love their wives. This seems to have been possible but scarcely usual as an ideal outside Christianity.

Finally, in nearly all positions on the entire feminine question, we have found Paul very much a man of his time. Usually he was a Jew, but in some important respects he took an opposing stand along with pagans. In fact, he inclined to be an eclectic, keeping to the status quo when possible. He was seldom original in particulars, but was perhaps unique in the way in which he gathered various elements together out of Judaism, paganism and church tradition and made them serve him in establishing and conducting his churches on the whole successfully. In his communities, families were a bulwark of the church and furnished a model for its procedure. Dr. Gottlieb finds in Paul a social advance in his care to urge the husband to be kind "to the inferior creature at his side who is unquestionably obliged to submit herself to him."

As to Paul's position religiously, she says:

"The apostle commonly keeps at a far distance from drawing the logical conclusion of the Christian root-principle he himself formulated in Galatians 3:26-28, - that he placed side by side two like souls, of equal worth, equal dignity, and equal rights in the sight of God; indeed, he was not once able . . . to hold firmly to that principle himself."<sup>1</sup>

Concerning Paul's social theory this criticism appears just. In practice, we have found him more liberal and ready to value persons empirically. His inconsistencies lead us to see,

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<sup>1</sup>Elfriede Gottlieb, Die Frau im frühen Christentum (Leipzig, 1928), p. 20.

once more, how much he was bound by contemporary mores. Pagan and Jewish practice, too, often outran their theory in genuine appreciation of, and consideration for, the female sex. To the mind of the present writer he made his most original and vital contribution to feminine progress when he seized, however fleetingly, upon that lofty Galatian principle and gave a recognition, of living, growing potentiality, to the essential equality of all persons who were "in union with Christ Jesus."





